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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001048

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: BUGGING INCIDENT BOOMERANGS ON OPPOSITION

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, for Reasons 1.4 (b),d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. Hastily condemned as Turkey's own Watergate, an alleged government bugging incident is looking increasingly like a technical blooper by the supposed "victim". Despite evidence to the contrary, opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) Chairman Deniz Baykal stands by his man, Secretary General Onder Sav, in blaming the government and fueling fears of rampant wiretaps and buggings, but has dropped threats of a censure motion against the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and is supporting the AKP-initiated parliamentary investigation instead. Whatever the result, the sudden focus on various agencies' broad mandate for electronic eavesdropping -- in principle, an important counter-terrorism tool -- has alarmed the public and renewed fears of the Fethullah Gulen group's grip on the police. A June 4 Court of Appeals ruling that no institution may conduct nationwide wiretapping abolished the Jandarma's wiretapping authority and may pave the way for annulling similar powers held by other security and intelligence agencies. If Sav's incident was human error, CHP will look foolish. But the government, and the state, may also take a hit if further investigation reveals widespread abuses that intrude on, rather than protect, Turkish citizens. END SUMMARY.

CHP Refuses to be Sheepish

12. (SBU) After Islamist daily Vakit published a transcript of Secretary General Sav's meeting with former Bolu governor Ali Serindag in late May, Sav furiously accused the government of bugging his office, blaming the Turkish National Police (TNP) and its possible connections to a religious order. After both landline and cellular providers' records confirmed that Sav received a 44-minute phone call from a Vakit journalist during the meeting with Serindag, Sav stubbornly insisted he had been bugged. The Vakit journalist claims Sav failed to end the call, allowing him to listen in while Sav and Serindag discussed the political climate in Bolu, groused about Prime Minister Erdogan's unannounced R&R visit to the province, and speculated about religious brotherhood connections of cabinet members.

13. (SBU) At CHP's parliamentary group meeting June 3, Baykal charged that publishing such a conversation "in a militant newspaper of the government" was a crime, adding that the judiciary was taking up the issue. He claimed the incident revealed a prime ministry arrangement to listen in on 70

million citizens. Baykal implied that the Fethullah Gulen community, widely believed to dominate the TNP, was collecting information suitable for blackmail.

14. (SBU) Media tone underwent a 180-degree about-face over the weekend, from the initial "Watergate" comparisons to sharp criticism of CHP and calls for Sav's resignation for misleading the public, fueling paranoia, and being too inept or out of touch to use a cellphone properly. By June 4, media attention had incorporated details of a questionable contract of indentured servitude between CHP -- in the person of Sav -- and Kanalturk television station.

Parliament Scrutinizes Electronic Surveillance

15. (SBU) In a June 1 written statement, TNP Intelligen